Title of Session: Virginia Center for Digital History
Moderator: Melissa Boese
Guest Speaker: Andy Mink
Title of File: 20050915AndyMinkVAdighist
Date: September 15, 2005

Room: TNE Teacher's Lounge

DavidWe: Melissa. Most discussions usually begin with a short introduction of each of the participants

DavidWe: So, if you want to start, we can introduce ourselves...

AndyMi: great

MelissaBo: Sounds good

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I've used Tapped In for 8 years and I help teachers learn more about technology and the Internet for math and science. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City

MichaelH is a social studies teacher in Southwestern Indiana

BrianPC: Brian Collins. I'm a grad student at Michigan State/lead the EASE History project.

MelissaBo: I'm Melissa Boese - I'm in Virginia - I'm an Enrichment Teacher at an all-girls middle school.

AndyMi: I'm Andy Mink -- thanks for joining the chat. I'm the Director of Outreach and Education at the Virginia Center for Digital History at the University of Virginia.

AndyMi: Prior to that, I taught history at middle school for ten years.

BrianPC: I should say that I'm a former history teacher too. 6 years.

AndyMi: The focus of my work now is to work with K-12 classroom teachers on ways to integrate the digital history archives at VCDH in their classroom.

AndyMi: I'm the "bridge" between the university scholarly world and the K-12 classroom....a place most professors haven't been since they were teenagers.

AndyMi: So, how should we begin? Questions, comments...thoughts?

MelissaBo: Is it difficult to bridge the work?

AndyMi: I always felt as a history teacher that there was a layer between me and the content....

AndyMi: the curriculum, the textbook, the daily grind of teaching

AndyMi: frequently prevented me from searching for and finding the primary source materials

AndyMi: that I knew were important tools for my class.

AndyMi: One advantage of working with VCDH

MichaelH agrees with that

AndyMi: is that my colleagues are historians

AndyMi: they "do history" in the truest sense of the word

AndyMi: and the materials that we host are those found, vetted, and put together by historians

AndyMi: the internet can be an overwhelming source

AndyMi: of material for teachers

MelissaBo: I know what you mean

AndyMi: and it's important to share these resources

AndyMi: they are free for educational use

AndyMi: the links aren't ephemeral

AndyMi: and most importantly

AndyMi: they are vetted by historians....you can trust their origins and value

AndyMi: On the other hand, the projects

AndyMi: are not built for the K-12 student

AndyMi: they aren't places that you would necessarily sit your class in front of without a lot of facilitation

AndyMi: (although some are used in AP and secondary syllabi)

AndyMi: I think they are great places for teachers to use to find materials that help students dig into the past

AndyMi: Have any of you used any of our projects?

MelissaBo: that's how I've used the Valley of the Shadow project - to help my students with a journaling project.

AndyMi: Yes -- Valley was the flagship project....our first and most used

BrianPC: I used Valley of the Shadow a long time ago.

AndyMi: Valley, like all of our projects, is growing and evolving almost every day.

AndyMi: There is a fleet of grad students crunching data into the site....updating it with new material.

AndyMi: I think that's another advantage that online archives offer -- dynamic, evolving sources of information and materials

SusanR joined the room.

AndyMi: In the end, though, I think the digital archives are just another tool....

AndyMi: Another way to encourage students to see history as interactive and hands-on

MelissaBo: Hi Susan!

AndyMi: rather than a lecture-heavy subject of memorization

SusanR: Hi Melissa

AndyMi: Hi Susan - welcome.

MichaelH waves to Sue

AndyMi: I can tell you that historians rarely memorize...most aren't sitting with flash cards fixating on dates and places. They work with the material in a critical way....and I think that's the approach that best serves students as well.

SusanR enjoys this warm reception

AndyMi: Those factoids then become useful and have context.

AndyMi: Susan - can you briefly introduce yourself? Where from?

SusanR: from Canada, Ottawa, Ontario

SusanR: I am a K to 8 Occasional Teacher

AndyMi: Great - thanks for joining us.

BrianPC: Do you think the Valley project will always continue? Quite a difference between an online project and publishing a book.

AndyMi: You're actually touching on a very controversial issue in the history field.

AndyMi: The academic world larges bases its hierarchy (and tenure) on The Book.

AndyMi: Historians who are now working on digital projects and digital scholarship face long odds because much of the field doesn't recognize or understand this new medium for scholarship.

AndyMi: yes, Valley and our other projects are permanent....

BrianPC: It's the same in my field. Learning, Technology, and Culture.

AndyMi: and hopefully a new generation of historians will continue to see this as a way to further explore our understanding of the past.

AndyMi: A book is a linear relationship between author and reader....I start on page 1 and end on page XX.

AndyMi: Digital scholarship allows the reader to make choices....

AndyMi: think critically....compare different threads.....

AndyMi: and ideally offer feedback.

AndyMi: Historians are a stodgy bunch, and I'm not sure many understand the power of technology for their field.

AndyMi: maybe the same can be said of classroom teachers, though....

MelissaBo: How have you seen other projects used in the k-12 classroom?

AndyMi: Other than Valley?

MelissaBo: yes

AndyMi: Again, I think VCDH projects simply offer access to a wealth of primary source materials. We don't offer interpretation of those sources, and most of our projects do not continue lesson plans. They are historical archives.

AndyMi: I think they are only as valuable as the methodology of the teacher allows.

AndyMi: For example,

AndyMi: it's often very difficult to teach sensitive and emotional topics in a history classroom, issues like civil rights, social justice, race and place.

AndyMi: I think one of the most effective ways to create a classroom culture in which you can discuss those topics

AndyMi: is through primary source materials.

AndyMi: I frequently showcase our newest site

AndyMi: "Television News of the Civil Rights Era"

AndyMi: which is an archive of hundreds of hours of raw television film from the 1950s and 1960s in rural Virginia

AndyMi: (The station "found" hundreds of boxes of the original 8MM film, gave them to us, and we digitized them."

BrianPC: Can we have the link?

AndyMi: Iconic images like Rosa Parks and Birmingham are valuable ways to teach civil rights....

AndyMi: but I always felt a little too "big" for students to really identify with.

MelissaBo: http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/civilrightstv/

SusanR . o O (That is a valuable "find", Andy)

AndyMi: This footage shows like in Jim Crow in a place-based, local, accessible way

AndyMi: and I feel allows students to wrap their minds around these issues effectively.

AndyMi: The other nice parallel, in my opinion

AndyMi: is that this is truly raw historical resources

AndyMi: No one has seen them before

AndyMi: and historians are currently basing their scholarship on these materials

AndyMi: so as a teacher, I can show these streaming video clips and ask students to analyze them AT THE SAME TIME a professional historian is doing his work....

AndyMi: As a teacher, I always wanted students to be curious....if I had that in a history classroom, more than half of my job was done. I think looking at primary source material like these clips creates that curiosity

MelissaBo: the oral histories are also a great tool.

AndyMi: and then I can answer the questions....or not. Or encourage them to seek answers in other places.

AndyMi: Yes, oral histories....

BrianPC: Are you thinking about providing links from the videos to current research?

AndyMi: http://www.southernspaces.org/contents/2004/thomas/4a.htm

AndyMi: this is the first published work....

AndyMi: I am also working with teachers from four counties that are in the viewing audience of this TV station

AndyMi: over the next three years, they are going to conduct their own research based on the films

AndyMi: to create PSA about the legacy of the civil rights movement in this community

AndyMi: to be aired on the same station

BrianPC: Great project.

AndyMi: We also have grad students currently sitting with the elderfolk in these communities trying to identify some of the faces on the films....

AndyMi: isn't that what historians do? and wouldn't it be great for students to have the same questions, seek answers? That's what makes history relevant...meaningful...applicable....not just facts in a dusty old textbook.

MelissaBo: My students and I were just at Montpelier - I think we will take a look at the Dolly Madison project this week as well.

BrianPC: Textbooks just aren't very good at question generating. Images/videos are much better.

AndyMi: Exactly. There's a place for textbooks and direct instruction.

AndyMi: But primary source material is what generates the inquiry....and that's ultimately what historians do when you say "do history".

AndyMi: Technology is valuable to a K-12 teacher if it allows you to do something you couldn't do otherwise....

AndyMi: and it is a wonderful way to connect students with these kinds of resources.

BrianPC: Definitely. Students need more opportunities to do history.

SusanR: With all this access to primary sources and the LOC, History/Social Studies must be taking on a different flavour in classes

AndyMi: I wish I could say yes.

AndyMi: I think many teachers still struggle with that leap of faith

AndyMi: Working with primary resources is time consuming

AndyMi: it's messy

MelissaBo: and working with technology is the same

AndyMi: and frankly, kids don't know how to do it. Most come to a history class thinking that they are there to receive my lecture, memorize the facts, and be done.

AndyMi: Show them a photo and ask them to compare and contrast? Or infer knowledge without context? Or put things in sequence?

AndyMi: Those learning "muscles" are atrophied.

AndyMi: So the teacher has to teach differently, too....and give students opportunities to exercise those muscles.

BrianPC: Students feel comfortable working with video. It's like we are finally playing on their turf.

AndyMi: Not many teachers are committed to doing so in an age of state-mandated tests and under the burden of time.

AndyMi: yes, they do --

AndyMi: but can they create authentic historical scholarship through video?

AndyMi: (I would argue yes....but the teacher has to be prepared to facilitate that process.)

BrianPC: Of course. We just need to surround those videos with supportive resources.

AndyMi: yes.

AndyMi: and a clear culture that history isn't a dead subject....that it's explorative and trial and error.

MelissaBo: Any last questions for Andy?

SusanR: Students would like to live the history..at least for a short while ie http://www.canada.com/ottawa/ottawacitizen/features/littlehouse/index.html

BrianPC: The Landscape of History by Gaddis is a terrific book. He makes history sound like an adventure.

DavidWe appreciates Andy's efforts to make it to Tapped In today

MichaelH applauds

BrianPC: Thanks Andy. Great to talk to you.

DavidWe wonders if Michael mentioned the Library of Congress presentation by Leni Donlan later on

MelissaBo: I'll go check that out Susan - thanks for sharing it with us.

MichaelH hasn't yet

SusanR: It's Canadian; but it is relevant

MichaelH: join us again in an hour as Leni Donlan of the Library of Congress hosts her monthly Learning Page chat!

AndyMi: What's the deal with that? I actually have a meeting with Leni tomorrow morning....this will be a nice opening connection

AndyMi: Thanks everyone -- please be in touch anytime you have questions or thoughts.

BrianPC: Thanks Melissa for hosting this.

MichaelH: Andy, Leni does a monthly chat here... you're welcome to stay and join in if you'd like

AndyMi: my email is ATM5W@VIRGINIA.EDU

AndyMi: I might stop in -- thanks for the invite.

MichaelH: Leni goes at 8 p.m. Eastern time

MelissaBo: You're very welcome!

AndyMi: Thanks, Melissa.

MelissaBo: Andy - thank you very much for your information and generosity with your time.

MelissaBo: Bye everyone

AndyMi: Goodnight.

DavidWe: Take care, Melissa.

MelissaBo: thanks David

DavidWe: You're most welcome